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**The Churches  
and**

**SEGREGATION**



**An Official Statement and Resolution adopted by the  
General Board of the National Council of the Churches  
of Christ in the U. S. A. in Chicago, Illinois, June 11, 1952**



# The Churches and

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# SEGREGATION\*

## INTRODUCTION

As Christian disciples work together, their redemptive power in society is heightened. That power is released most transformingly when, in motive and method, it flows directly from the mandates of our Lord. In this statement, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. sets forth some of the clear implications of Christ's command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

## I. THE PATTERN OF SEGREGATION

Segregation is the externally imposed separation or division of individual persons or groups, based on race, color or national origin. It is practiced, with some difference of emphasis, in all sections of the country. In many places, segregation is established and supported by law. In others, it is almost as rigidly enforced by social custom and economic practices.

Segregation is an expression of the superiority-inferiority attitudes concerning race, color or national origin held tenaciously by vast numbers of Americans. Segregation is not only the expression of an attitude; it is also the means by which that attitude is transmitted from one generation

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\*"The Churches and Segregation" is a revision of an official statement titled "The Church and Race Relations" approved by The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America at a special meeting in Columbus, Ohio, March 5-7, 1946.

to another. Children in our society, observing minorities as we segregate them, cannot easily escape the inference that such minorities are inferior.

Moreover, segregation as practiced in the United States probably has more effect on the attitudes of the young than the formal teachings of the schools about democracy or of the churches about Christian brotherhood.

Segregation subjects sections of our population to constant humiliation and forces upon them moral and psychological handicaps in every relation of life. Still more devastating is the moral and spiritual effect upon the majority.

Segregation has meant inferior services to the minority segregated. The theory of "separate but equal" services does not work out in practice; segregation is always discriminatory. Discrimination sets apart those discriminated against so that in effect, they are segregated spiritually and psychologically, if not always physically.

Segregation as applied to our economic system denies to millions of our people free access to the means of making a living and sets for them insurmountable obstacles in their efforts to achieve freedom from want.

At all times and particularly in great crises, segregation makes it impossible to utilize fully large sections of our manpower. It seriously limits the contributions of racial and cultural minority groups to the ongoing life of our people in every aspect of our national existence.

Segregation handicaps our Nation in international relationships. At a time when the United States has come to play a leading role among the nations of the free world, our racial practices which are publicized abroad are made the basis of charges of hypocrisy against the Nation. These charges reverberate throughout the world in a period when the largely submerged non-white groups are becoming self-conscious, striving for recognition of their dignity, for autonomy and equal opportunity. The world community which we are seeking to build must rest on genuine respect for the worth of persons who are created equally the sons of God.

Large numbers of our citizens are being dis-

franchised and discriminated against as a result of the fears and mutual suspicions engendered by the pattern of segregation. These cause unnecessary confusion in dealing with important public issues, create unreal political divisions and give rise to a type of political appeal that threatens our democracy and democratic institutions.

Segregation increases and accentuates racial tension. It is worth noting that race riots in this country have seldom occurred in neighborhoods with a racially mixed population. Our worst riots have broken out along the edges of and in rigidly segregated areas.

Above all, the principle of segregation is a denial of the Christian faith and ethic which stems from the basic premise taught by our Lord that all men are created the children of God. The pattern of segregation is diametrically opposed to what Christians believe about the worth of persons and if we are to be true to the Christian faith we must take our stand against it.

## II. THE CHURCHES AND THE PATTERN OF SEGREGATION

The pattern of segregation in the United States is given moral sanction by the fact that churches and church institutions, as a result of insensitivity and social pressure, have so largely accepted this pattern in their own life and practice.

### A. *Segregation in Church Practice*

While the pattern of segregation is too common in our public education at all levels, it is even more general in the churches in worship and fellowship. There are large areas of the public education field where racial separation is not practiced and only a relatively few churches which are racially inclusive in practice.\* Furthermore, the

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#### \*FACTS ABOUT SEGREGATION IN THE CHURCHES

"There are approximately 6,500,000 Protestant (church members among) Negroes. About 6,000,000 are in separate Negro denominations. Therefore, from the local church through the regional organization to the national assemblies over 90% of the Negroes are

pattern of segregation in public education appears to be changing more rapidly than in the churches.

While there are some exceptions among the communions and in certain interdenominational agencies, notably councils of churches, nevertheless, religious bodies are generally divided on a racial basis, in national organizations, in regional bodies and in local congregations. The acceptance by the churches of this pattern of segregation is so prevalent that fellowship between white and non-white Christians in the United States is frequently awkward and unsatisfactory.

It should be noted, however, that the communions have expressed an increasing concern for the elimination of segregation from the churches and society. Since the statement titled "The Church and Race Relations" was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches in 1946, the national bodies of twenty communions have issued statements that sanction the practice of an inclusive ministry to all people without regard to race, color or national origin. Nine of these national church bodies have renounced the pattern of segregation both in their own fellowship and in society; two have placed emphasis on the elimination of discrimination; and nine have indicated their concern for justice and opportunity for all people. In addition to defining denominational policy, these statements have served as a basis for launching denomina-

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without association in work and worship with Christians of other races except in interdenominational organizations which involve a few of their leaders. The remaining 500,000 Negro Protestants, about 10%, are in denominations predominantly white. Of these about 95%, judging by the surveys of six denominations, are in segregated congregations and are in association with their white denominational brothers only in national assemblies, and, in some denominations, in regional, state or more local jurisdictional meetings. The remaining 5% of the 10% in white denominations are members of local churches which are predominantly white. Thus only one-half of one per cent of the Negro Protestant Christians of the United States worship regularly in churches with fellow Christians of another race. This typical pattern occurs, furthermore, for the most part in communities where there are only a few Negro families and where, therefore, there are only on an average two or three Negro individuals in the white churches." (Racial Policies and Practices of Major Protestant Denominations, by Frank Loescher — Re-

tional programs for the improvement of racial and cultural relations.

While members of racial groups other than the one to which a majority of the congregation belongs are not absolutely barred by a rule from attendance, in many local churches the self-consciousness which their presence arouses bars them from freedom to worship in fellowship, and even from the initial contact.

At the level of the local church there are some encouraging examples of pastors, church officers and congregations who have come to grips with the dilemma of the segregated church. There are congregations and especially Sunday church schools and vacation church schools which are racially inclusive, and there are other church groups in the process of becoming so. These efforts need to be more widely known and the methods employed shared more fully with others.

A church located in a community in which the population is changing has a responsibility to serve the people of that community without regard to race, color or national origin. National and regional denominational bodies as well as councils of churches should encourage local congregations to consider this responsibility and cooperate with them in achieving this type of service.

However, the local church faces the difficult, although not insurmountable, obstacle of segre-

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search Study — 1946. Available in manuscript form at the office of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, The National Council of Churches, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York.)

The statistical table found on page 68, "The Protestant Church and the Negro," by Frank Loescher, published in 1948, indicates that 860 churches out of 17,900 to whom questionnaires were sent, reported Negro participation in predominantly white churches. This indicates that 4.8% of the churches in six communions reported Negro participation.

In a cooperative study of 13,597 churches, 1331 predominantly white churches in three communions reported membership or attendance by persons of one or more racial minority groups. This indicates that 9.8% of the total number of churches in three communions are racially inclusive in membership or attendance. (1952) (See article titled "Protestant Churches—Are They Racially Inclusive?" by Alfred S. Kramer, in *THE CITY CHURCH*, Volume III, Number 2, March, 1952.)

gated housing in both the city and the suburbs. When a church is located in a community where segregated housing limits the population to one racial or cultural group, the people whom the church serves will tend to be limited to that racial or cultural group. Churches and councils of churches should, therefore, take definite steps to help create unsegregated residential communities where normal day-to-day relationships will develop among people of all races, colors, creeds and national origins.

### ***B. Racial Practices in Church Hospitals Similar to those in Non-Church Hospitals***

The racial practices of hospitals controlled by or affiliated with communions are little different from such practices in other hospitals. Negro nurses, doctors and patients are excluded from many church hospitals just as they are from similar institutions secularly controlled. To some degree this exclusion applies to other minority racial and cultural groups. The correction of this situation is complicated by the fact that in many instances these church hospitals have lost their close organic connection with the communions and have come more and more to accept the standards of the secular community. Some are private institutions no longer connected with the church even though their religious or denominational names still imply such a connection. However, a number still maintain a more or less definite relationship with the communions.

### ***C. Segregation in Church-Related Educational Institutions***

Church-related educational institutions established for constituencies predominantly white are somewhat less segregated than hospitals. There are church-related schools at all educational levels which have always maintained the practice of admitting students without regard to race, color, creed or national origin and there are others which have adopted this practice. Nevertheless, there are still large numbers of our church schools which would no more depart from the practice of exclu-



sion than would secular institutions under similar circumstances. Some of these schools resort to devices to avoid accepting qualified Negro, Jewish or Oriental students. Even after admission, some schools fail to fulfill the obligation of completely integrating members of minority racial and cultural groups into the life of the institution.

#### ***D. Theological Institutions Frequently Practice Exclusion***

The changes which have been made recently by a number of theological seminaries in their policies and practices so as to admit students without regard to race, color or national origin, are commendable. However, there are still others which practice exclusion on the basis of race, color or national origin. In view of this, it is not strange that large numbers of our white ministers are uncertain and lack concern about race relations. On the other hand, ministers who are members of minority groups frequently doubt the sincerity of their brethren of the majority group. Fellowship among ministers in this country is frequently strained and unsatisfactory. It will continue to be so as long as we practice segregation to any extent in ministerial training. Association among persons of different racial groups, in their training, should be a vital part of the education of ministers.

#### ***E. The Churches and Employment Practices***

The employment of ministers in a segregated pattern continues the strained and unsatisfactory fellowship which often exists in the theological institutions. With few exceptions, ministers who are members of racial and cultural minority groups must serve congregations which are composed of members of their own groups. This system of employment tends to perpetuate the segregated local church. Ministers should be called or appointed to churches primarily on the basis of character, ability and qualifications set up by the communion or local church, rather than on the basis of race, color or national origin.

Moreover, it is not customary for state, area or

national denominational and interdenominational boards and agencies to employ members of minority racial and cultural groups as professional or executive staff for service at home and abroad. The exception to this is occasional employment in work involving either their own particular group or race relations. It is noted with satisfaction that the communions and the interdenominational agencies now employ persons rather generally in secretarial and clerical positions on the basis of character and ability, without regard to race, color or national origin. What has been accomplished in this regard should be adopted as a pattern in the employment of professional or executive staff. The Christian witness of the churches which calls for fair employment practices in the community, state and Nation is immeasurably strengthened by a demonstration of fair employment practices in the life and work of the churches.

#### ***F. The Responsibility of the Churches to Eliminate Segregation***

Christians in the United States, more than ever before, honestly desire that quality of Christian fellowship which brings to the total Church the gifts of all for the spiritual enrichment of each. Efforts directed toward such spiritual enrichment are frequently confused and ineffectual because of the pattern of segregation which defeats goodwill. Many persons find themselves frustrated when they attempt to live out their Christian impulses within a racially segregated society.

The Church, when true to its higher destiny, has always understood that its gospel of good news has a two-fold function, namely:

To create new men with new motives;

To create a new society wherein such men will find a favorable environment within which to live their Christian convictions.

The churches in the United States, while earnestly striving to nurture and develop individuals of goodwill, have not dealt adequately with the fundamental pattern of segregation in our society

which thwarts their efforts. This must be corrected. The churches should continue to emphasize the first function. In addition, they must launch a more comprehensive program of action in fulfillment of the second function. This is imperative now.

### **III. THE NATIONAL COUNCIL AND SEGREGATION**

The communions and the interdenominational agencies have faced this question and taken action on it. A number of the interdenominational agencies which merged to form the National Council of Churches had renounced the pattern of segregation based on race, color or national origin as unnecessary and undesirable and a violation of basic Christian principles. A number of the communions have adopted the 1946 statement of the Federal Council of Churches and others have adopted statements of their own on this question.

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. in its organizational structure and operation, renounces and earnestly recommends to its member churches that they renounce the pattern of segregation based on race, color or national origin as unnecessary and undesirable and a violation of the Gospel of love and human brotherhood. While recognizing that historical and social factors make it more difficult for some churches than for others to realize the Christian ideal of non-segregation, the Council urges all of its constituent members to work steadily and progressively towards a non-segregated church as the goal which is set forth in the faith and practice of the early Christian community and inherent in the New Testament idea of the Church of Christ. As proof of our sincerity in this renunciation, the National Council of Churches will work for a non-segregated church and a non-segregated community.

### **IV. THE CHURCHES SHOULD ASCERTAIN THE FACTS ABOUT THEIR OWN PRACTICES**

We urge that in studying their own practices, the churches use the following statement of principles as a standard of measurement:

## **A. Membership**

All persons who accept Christ as Lord and Master and the doctrinal standards of the communion ought to be invited and welcomed into membership of our communion's parish churches.

## **B. Fellowship**

Christian fellowship means that all who accept Christ as Lord and Master are united by bonds of brotherhood which transcend race, color or national origin.

## **C. Worship**

Worship opportunities inclusive of all groups ought to be available both regularly and frequently, so as to make such worship a normal expression of our common worship of God without self-consciousness or embarrassment.

## **D. Outreach of the Minister**

The outreach of the minister should be inclusive. This means that his services ought to be available to persons of all groups in the community without discrimination.

## **E. Educational and Welfare Services**

Church-related schools, colleges, hospitals, homes for children and the aged and other institutions have a responsibility to serve persons who are members of their communion without regard to race, color or national origin.

Church camps, conferences and projects conducted for the purpose of training persons for leadership or participation in the program and activities of the churches have a responsibility to serve the churches and their members without regard to race, color or national origin.

## **F. Employment**

Christian churches demonstrate belief in the essential worth of persons because they are the children of God when they provide full oppor-

tunities for the employment at all levels and on the same basis of character and ability, of all persons found in the membership of their communion, including those from racial and cultural minorities.

## **V. THE CHURCHES SHOULD ELIMINATE SEGREGATION FROM THEIR OWN PRACTICES**

If the churches would remove the validity of the charge implied by the world when it says "Physician, heal thyself," they should act promptly and decisively to eliminate segregation from their own practices, taking steps to formulate plans of action based on answers to the following essential questions:

### **A. Membership**

How many churches are there in our communion in which people are not welcome to membership because of race, color or national origin? What actions are necessary to correct this situation?

### **B. Fellowship**

Does racial segregation or exclusion create a chasm which places profound limitations upon Christian fellowship within the life of a geographical community? If so, what should be done to remove these limitations?

### **C. Worship**

What is the extent of racial segregation or exclusion in the services of worship provided by our communion? What steps are necessary to correct this situation?

### **D. Outreach of the Minister**

Is the outreach of the minister inclusive of all people? Are his services available to persons of all groups in the community?

### **E. Educational and Welfare Services**

What is the extent of racial segregation or ex-

clusion in the practices of schools, colleges, seminaries, hospitals, homes, camps, young people's conferences and similar institutions affiliated with our communion? What are the steps that should now be authorized and carried out by the responsible boards of the communion to rectify these practices?

### **F. Employment**

Do the local, state and area organizations, national boards and general ecclesiastical offices of our communion provide opportunities for employment on the basis of character and ability without regard to race, color or national origin? If not, what administrative procedures should be proposed within our communion to bring employment practices within its entire life into conformity with the ideals of a "non-segregated church and a non-segregated community?"

## **VI. THE CHURCHES SHOULD HELP TO RELIEVE COMMUNITY TENSIONS**

Churches, having chosen to renounce the pattern of segregation as a violation of the Gospel of love which is committed unto them, and having outlined steps by which that pattern shall be eliminated from their own practices, should at the same time direct their attention to the community, at the national, state and local levels.

In order that the community may sense the transforming power of organized religion in relieving community tensions arising from the pattern of segregation, the churches should assume responsibility for dealing with such questions as discrimination in employment, housing, education, health and leisure-time activities. We should cooperate with other organizations in the formulation and execution of a community-wide plan of action to eliminate patterns of segregation and to change the policies and practices that create tensions.

### **OUR HOPE AND STRENGTH**

We thank God, especially in a time when so many men are estranged from Him and from one

another, that He has created us "of one blood" and through Christ has brought Christians into one family. It was by God's power that Christ's disciples lived and worked in love. This faith that Christians are "one body in Christ," commits us inevitably to the task of transcending barriers of race, color and nationality in our churches and in our communities until we may, by His Grace, one day demonstrate our faith that "we are members one of another."

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